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June 14, 1984

What About East Timor?

Dear Colleague:

I would like to invite you to cosign the letter on the back of this sheet to Secretary of State Shultz regarding the ongoing tragedy in East Timor, the largely Roman Catholic former Portuguese colony which was invaded and occupied by Indonesia in 1975.

Secretary of State Shultz will be visiting Indonesia during the course of his trip to Asia in early July. This will be the first visit by an American Secretary of State to Indonesia since Secretary of State Kissinger was in Jakarta on December 6, 1975 -- unfortuitously, the day before Indonesian troops launched their initial full-scale invasion of East Timor.

The East Timor tragedy is not a matter of past history. Last August, Indonesian forces launched a major military offensive against continuing Timorese resistance. Information provided in recent months by the current head of East Timor's Roman Catholic Church, Monsignor Carlos Ximenes Belo, indicates that the offensive is having grave human consequences, at a time when there is virtually no access to the territory by international humanitarian agencies. Another disturbing development is that Monsignor Belo has indicated that there have been instances of harassment of the church, the only independent institution able to provide solace for many East Timorese.

The letter urges Secretary of State Shultz to raise the issue of East Timor with the Indonesians when he visits Jakarta. If you would like to cosign this letter, please contact Marty Rendon at Extension 56465.

Sincerely,

Tony P. Hall

Tony P. Hall
Member of Congress

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are distressed over the continuing tragedy in East Timor, the largely Roman Catholic territory which was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. Since that time, by most credible accounts, more than 100,000 East Timorese have perished from the combined effects of the Indonesian occupation.

Recent reports indicate that the death and suffering in the former Portuguese colony are continuing. We believe that it is of critical importance that the plight of the people of East Timor be accorded serious attention in the meetings that you will conduct with the Indonesian leadership on the occasion of your visit to Indonesia, the first by an American Secretary of State since the 1975 invasion.

We are keenly aware of the importance of Indonesia and the need to maintain good relations between our two countries. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the situation in East Timor where, as in Afghanistan, a people are living under a military regime imposed by force, in violation of international law.

Information reaching us this year from a variety of church and refugee sources suggests that the Indonesian offensive begun last summer has continued and has been accompanied by atrocities against the Timorese population. For example, a letter dated February 18, 1984, from the head of the Catholic Church in East Timor, Monsignor Carlos Ximenes Belo, to his predecessor, Monsignor Martinho da Costa Lopes, described activities in some parts of the territory that are similar to the forced march of tens of thousands of Timorese males by the Indonesian military in 1981 that caused great loss of life. Monsignor Belo also claimed that the Timorese people are beset by "sickness, hunger, lack of liberty and persecution." The well-regarded clergyman stated that "the Church is being persecuted and accused," with the residence of Salesian priests in one center being "savagely searched" by elite Indonesian troops. Other church accounts in recent months have spoken of largescale aerial bombardments of villages and still others of massacres.

Additional details are virtually impossible to obtain, for the Indonesian military continues to seal off East Timor from contact with independent journalists and international church and human rights groups. It has been a source of frustration to many international observers over the years that it has been so hard to get the facts about East Timor.

The overall picture that emerges is very disconcerting. Progress toward unrestricted, normalized access to East Timor has been negligible. Congressional concern in this regard prompted the House to adopt an East Timor amendment to H.R. 5119, the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1984. This amendment, now Section 914 of the foreign aid authorization bill, expresses the sense of Congress that the President should take all appropriate measures to encourage the Indonesians to allow increased access to East Timor by international relief agencies, international journalists, and international human rights organizations.

To help implement the concern expressed by the House in Section 914, we respectfully request that you raise these issues with the Indonesian Government during your visit to Jakarta. In particular, we would urge you to request that the International Red Cross be allowed increased access to East Timor. We are mindful of the disastrous famine and suffering that occurred between 1978 and 1980 when such international agencies at least were permitted limited visitations. We also would request that you raise the issue of the church to exist in East Timor free of persecution and harassment.

Finally, we would note that Section 914 calls upon the Administration to work with our concerned allies and the appropriate international organizations "to develop policies to end the ongoing human suffering in East Timor." We hope that you will take advantage of your trip to Indonesia to begin a dialogue with the Indonesians on constructive initiatives that could lead to an equitable settlement of the conflict in East Timor. Positive developments on the humanitarian issues we have raised could improve the prospects for a resolution of the causes of the human misery East Timor has experienced for nearly nine years. We urge you to make East Timor an important part of your agenda with the Government of Indonesia.